



## Transitional Duty

The term "transitional duty" is being increasingly recognized as the favored terminology for job duties that are held during periods of recovery. Transitional implies a limited duration assignment (6-8 weeks) as health status improves. Effectiveness of a transitional duty program as a cost management tool has a great deal to do with how well the organization accepts the transitional duty model - that jobs are limited in duration, and that they are for the purpose of moving the injured worker to the highest level of meaningful work possible, ultimately to his or her former position of employment by the end of eight weeks.

Finding transitional duty positions, particularly in small operations or where there is minimal job diversification, can be a challenge. Companies that are successful in driving down costs through transitional duty programs take the stance that "if they are released, they come back to work". There are two schools of thought on the provision of transitional duty. The first is to identify a group of jobs up front as limited duration, transitional duty positions. Jobs are typically of sufficiently low physical stress that most restrictions can be readily accommodated. Wherever possible, jobs should be meaningful. Mundane but necessary tasks, such as inventory, sorting, completing shipping and receiving documentation and routing mail provide the employee with a sense of contribution and help to offset the loss of full employment in the original position. The other alternative is to find transitional duty that specifically meets the employee's restrictions, and provides an opportunity for "work hardening" at the place of employment. While typically more effective and true to the transitional duty philosophy, this approach is more time intensive to implement, monitor and coordinate.

### **Options for Transitional Duty include:**

1. Regular job - accommodation/modification to the regular assignment
2. Regular job - with engineering changes - chair, stool, tools, powered equipment, change in height
3. Temporary duty re-assignments - to a different job classification or department and integrated into mainstream production jobs as much as possible.
4. Administrative - frequent breaks, fewer hours on the job, rotating jobs
5. Other temporary assignments - eliminate jobs that require the same activity, look for jobs that are vacant due to absenteeism or vacation, could be temporarily exchanged with the injured employee, need to be done but are not full-time, would be nice to have done but currently not justified with full time employees, jobs that are currently outsourced

### **Limits on Transitional Duty**

One of the most significant barriers to a successful transitional duty program occurs when transitional duty is viewed as soft, permanent jobs that don't contribute to the organization. In some organizations, jobs developed for transitional duty turn into preferred positions. Other employees may be offended by having to do extra work while others get the easy jobs.

Although companies vary on how long to make transitional duty last, the consensus is that limitations should be placed on the duration of the program. Management should communicate throughout the organization that the positions are intended as temporary in nature to allow for transition back to the former position of employment. The creation of open-ended positions that do not maintain this focus may be considered as eligible permanent positions under the Americans with Disabilities Act.

A well run transitional duty program can save money, improve morale and transition an injured worker to full productivity.

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